

Growing Support for Brief Intervention

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News Summary

Both state governments and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) are showing growing interest in getting family physicians to screen patients for possible addictive disorders, Newsweek reported Nov. 20.

Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral and Treatment (SBIRT) programs have made inroads in hospital emergency rooms; currently, the federal government funds SBIRT programs in trauma centers in 17 states.

Now, efforts are underway to get family doctors to adopt elements of SBIRT, as well; the theory is that patients trust their family doctors and would react positively to an intervention that is medically, not morally, based.

"We're trying to convince these doctors that if they do nothing else ... they will have had a major impact on public health," said ONDCP deputy director of demand reduction Bertha Madras.

"Most people who have a problem with drinking are right under the radar, and they're not seeing specialists. Family doctors could find them," said SBIRT expert Larry Gentilello of the University of Texas–Southwestern Medical School.

Researchers say that brief interventions can cut problem drinking and illicit-drug use in half.